OPINION

BY RAFIA ZAKARIA

Just deserts

THE Europeans have had a dispiriting week. In the snowy landscape of Davos, leaders of the major European nations had to have a huddle about US President Donald Trump's escalating rhetoric on taking over Greenland. There were righteous speeches and statements by them about how such a takeover would be the end of the rules-based international order. Canada, which Trump had also threatened with a takeover, got into the game, too, with Prime Minister Mark Carney decrying the rupture in North Atlantic relations and the imminence of a world where force eliminates respect for sovereignty.

It was oddly gratifying to see the world's political and economic elite, mostly white men and some white women, having to consider how devastating attacks on sovereignty can be and how a superpower gone rogue is a global threat. The rest of the world saw this face of the US post 9/11, in the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, both under the label of 'protecting US national security'. At that time, Europe joined forces with the US. So, why is Denmark suddenly so bothered with the details of sovereignty, especially given its part in the US-led Nato effort in Afghanistan? Nor did the US care when Barack Obama ordered unmanned aerial bombings of places in Pakistan. Definitions were altered to justify the US bombings in Yemen as well.

All this is to underscore that the international rules-based order that all the white men in Davos are weeping for died a long time ago. Or perhaps their tears simply affirm the truth that these rules were never considered applicable when the sovereignty of various brown and black people was at stake to ensure no one attacked the lands of the white colonisers.

The irony of the moment where one colonising power (Denmark) insists that its rights over Greenland are more legitimate than the rights of another (the US, a settler colonial country) must be noted. Listening to Carney's much-lauded speech, for instance, it was impossible not to recall that Canada's white people stole land from the First Nations. The temerity of white men who rule stolen lands and then chastise the world about further theft of land represents the disordered ethics that have made white and Western cooperation against the rest of the world a 'legitimate' exercise.

Denmark established trade relations in Greenland and its representatives set up outposts on the territory. The Danes realised they had made enough inroads to take over. They then imposed a trade monopoly on Greenland and what had been a trading company transformed itself into an administrative state.

In all the outcry, no one has acknowledged that Greenland's indigenous Kalaallit populations don't want to be ruled by either Denmark or the US. As Vijay Prashad of the Tricontinental Institute for Social Research notes: "Greenland is always a place that someone else must hold, but not the Kalaallit. For people like Trump, or indeed for generations of Danish prime ministers (despite soft statements about the path to self-determination), the Kalaallit have no role as political subjects." The true solution is not some backroom deal where the US can get what it wants while leaving Denmark with face-saving control, but a return of Greenland to its people.

The entire debacle underscores what the rules-based international order was really for. True to its origins, which go back to the time when the Great Powers carved up what remained of the Ottoman Empire, the rules-based international order ensures that white and Western nations, either colonisers or settler colonialists, do not mess with each other's illegitimate claims on territory. It also exists to legitimise the use of force impacting the sovereignty of brown and black countries when the aggressor is one of its own.

> Europe has now discovered it has no recourse against Trump.

For most of the world, the international rules-based order has never provided safety. The brutish world where force means the power to bully is one which everyone, except white and Western countries, has experienced. Currently, Europe is in a bind. It had saved money by not spending on military and defence, which allowed Europeans to have easy lifestyles. Europe has now discovered it has no recourse against Trump.

Whatever happens to Greenland, Europe, home to so many colonising powers that caused devastation and pain around the world, is getting its just deserts. Its weak economy and ageing populations are festering problems which America under Trump is likely to exploit. It's possible that Europe, while superficially independent, will be reduced to a functional colony of the US — dependent economically and militarily on the Americans. If it does, history will have come full circle: that which Europe did to others will now be done to Europe. ■

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BY MOHAMMAD ALI BABAKHEL

Police & EWRM

AN early warning and response mechanism aims to detect and address signs of violence before it occurs. Through EWRM police can engage with the community, respond to crises, spot early radicalisation, analyse risks and check escalation. Detecting extremist thought, recruitment efforts and planned violence early helps LEAs intervene before harm. Police are often the first to get reports of or note extremist threats. Working in society, they can identify vulnerable communities and monitor risky environments. But if they enjoy low public trust, how can EWRM work? Violent extremism grows gradually, often with clear signs. Avoiding a reactive mode, police must be proactive and be trusted as partners by the community. This needs police capacity building.

Trust can grow through community policing, cooperation, information sharing and engaging with religious leaders, youth groups and NGOs to create safe channels for reporting concerns. LEAs can be part of joint task forces to rehabilitate former extremists, but lack legal authority and know-how to identify online extremists. They can work with intel agencies to assess threat credibility and use community information to spot early signs. But low capacity and multiple tasks can mar EWRM efficacy, which requires understanding of radicalisation, human rights training, cultural sensitivity, youth engagement and crisis management.

Campuses can help in EWRM. Hubs of critical thought, they can also be breeding grounds for radicalisation and recruitment. Faculty aren't trained to discern early signs; students don't know where and how to report. Mashal Khan's lynching at Mardan University, and a suicide bombing at Karachi University reflect EWRM gaps. Still, faculty and student leaders are well-placed to spot behavioural changes. Campuses can be linked with 'referral systems' and help in preventive education and awareness, conflict resolution, interfaith and intercultural dialogue. But without clear reporting pathways, EWRM won't work; faculty and student leaders need training in PVE awareness, student-friendly reporting mechanisms must be created, and safe debate spaces promoted.

Many of the 25.3 million out-of-school children are involved in crime and extremism. Collaboration can encourage reporting of such tendencies with help from parents, LGs and welfare set-ups. PVE policies need LG-police cooperation. Weak communication between police, health and social services impacts EWRM. Traditional/tribal societies are reluctant to work with authorities; warnings by a relative or neighbour are seen as privacy intrusion and may lead to enmity. A proactive police role can help societies redefine privacy.

Ambiguous behaviour may mislead — isolation and religious interest may not always mean radicalisation; innocent individuals could be wrongly seen as threats. For better understanding, access to data (online activity, travel history, finances, etc) is needed — easily accessible to police but not other departments.

Police face a trust deficit, inadequate training, over-securitisation and an inability to balance rights and security. Their best option is to build long-term trust with communities. Community policing focuses on prevention, not just prosecution and kinetic options. Police must treat individuals as people at risk, not just threats. Actions must be transparent and accountable.

Article 47, KP Police Act, mandates setting up public liaison councils to help police prevent crime, inform them about issues that can lead to violence, new local tenants, misuse of loudspeakers and hate speech. In KP, 10,508, members of 909 PLCs are trying to do their bit in EWRM. Citizens police liaison committees are involved in EWRM in 15 KP districts; 27 CPLCs are functional. Chitral Police have a suicide prevention unit collaborating with communities. There are laws to curb loudspeaker misuse but enforcement needs police-public liaison.

> Community trust in police is essential.

Preventive education involves youth, women and LG reps to boost trust in police. It requires raising female officer numbers, presently just 3.2pc, which limits LEAs' efforts in EWRM. To counter this, police can introduce a hotline and links with social welfare institutions. EWRM isn't part of police training; for many, it's on-the-job learning; thus, making it part of training is inevitable. Parents' (especially mothers) limited capacity also limits efficacy. Mostly, parents of accused terrorists are unaware of their offspring's links with militants or only learn about it when they've become hardened militants.

Collaboration is thus critical as students spend most of their time with parents and teachers. Police can empower parents and teachers to spot early signs of extremism. Parent-teacher and police network collaboration must be encouraged and institutionalised. ■

The writer is author of Pakistan: In Between Extremism and Peace.
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FROM THE PAST PAGES OF DAWN

1976 | Fifty years ago

Tax recovery campaign

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Finance Minister, Mr Mohammed Hanif, has declared that the Government will determinedly pursue the current tax recovery campaign ensuring full realisation of taxes and duties from all those who are liable to pay. Talking to representatives of trade and commerce … today [Jan 23] Mr. Hanif said it was the moral, legal and above all national responsibility of every tax payer to co-operate with the Government and make the campaign a success in the overall interest of … the development of the country.

He said the Government did not intend to be harsh with those who voluntarily stepped forward and filed their returns before the deadline of March one... . He said that under the existing conditions when the national economy was faced with … adverse phenomena, both internal and external, the evasion of … taxes and duties amounted to seriously thwarting the efforts being made to stabilise the economy. Mr. Hanif expressed the hope that those sections of society who had earned fabulous income, entitling them to pay taxes … would not fall behind expectations… . The representatives assured [him] that they would extend their wholehearted cooperation. — News agencies

1951 | Seventy-five years ago

Development budget

KARACHI: A provision of about Rs 40 crores is expected to be made in the next budget of Pakistan for the implementation of the six-year national development plan. … This figure is just below one-third of the total internal finance to be invested in the national development plan, whose implementation is … beginning from July next. The amount to be found internally for investment in the Rs 260-crore plan is Rs 140 crores.

The manner in which these 40 crores of rupees are to be earmarked for the various national projects will be determined at the first meeting of the first National Planning Commission of Pakistan … on Jan 29. … It is believed that the pride of place on the agenda goes to projects of basic development, like agriculture. … Next … come industrial projects, the most important of which are believed to be power schemes. — News agencies

[Meanwhile, *Dawn*'s special representative in Lahore reports that], the names of Pakistan diplomats in foreign countries will be used without their usual diplomatic appellations when they are in Pakistan. … Now only Mr instead of His Excellency or any other title will be used... .

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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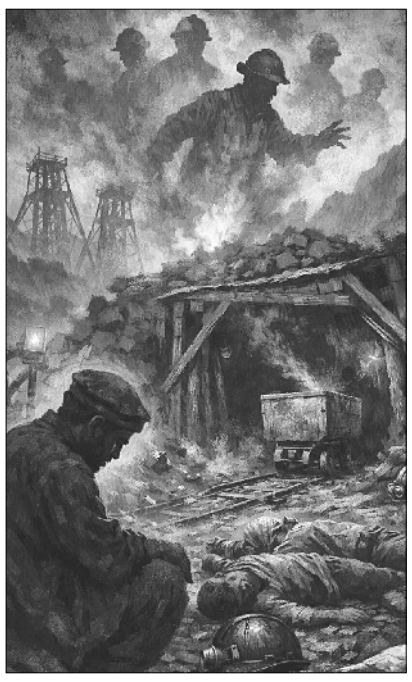
Letters may be edited for purposes of clarity and space. All letters should carry the writer's address, CNIC and phone numbers.



Coalmine tragedies and safety failures

COALMINING remains one of Pakistan's most crucial yet perilous industries, especially in Balochistan, where thousands of small, privately-run mines provide livelihoods to tens of thousands of workers. The province hosts nearly 3,500 mines, employing around 42,000 miners who extract thousands of tonnes of coal every day. Yet, behind this economic contribution lies a grim reality.

The sector continues to be plagued by deplorable working conditions, weak regulation, and a distressingly high frequency of accidents. Each year, hundreds of miners lose their lives or suffer permanent disabilities, while many develop chronic respiratory and musculoskeletal diseases due to prolonged exposure to unsafe and toxic environments.

The last year was no different, with a succession of tragedies underscoring the persistent dangers that our miners face. Between January and October, at least 53 mining accidents were reported in Balochistan, resulting in nearly 100 deaths and more than 200 injuries, though the actual numbers are likely to be higher due to routine underreporting.

These tragic incidents reflect chronic and systemic safety failures. Although Balochistan has enacted the Occupational Safety and Health Act, 2022, and had amended various industrial regulations in 2021, their enforcement has remained largely superficial.

The regulatory bodies have repeatedly failed to ensure compliance, hindered by corruption, inadequate inspections and a lack of accountability. As a result of such negligence, unsafe mining practices continue to pose risks to the miners' life.

The province's mining sector has long been scarred by major disasters. The root causes, like unchecked methane accumulation, poor ventilation, outdated extraction methods, and the absence of gas detection and fire suppression systems, persist without meaningful reforms.

A major underlying issue is Pakistan's failure to align with international safety standards. Despite expressing its intent in early 2023, Pakistan has yet to ratify the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Safety and Health in Mines Convention (C-176), which outlines comprehensive safety requirements. Opposition from some mining operators, who fear increased operational costs, continues to stall progress, even as fatalities rise.

Regardless of ratification, however, all ILO member states are obliged to promote safe and healthy working conditions, a responsibility Pakistan has yet to fulfil.

A comprehensive overhaul is urgently required. Effective enforcement of safety regulations, investment in modern ventilation and gas detection systems, mandatory training, and the establishment of properly equipped rescue services are essential.

Drawing lessons from countries like Australia and South Africa, where strict regulations and advanced technology have significantly reduced fatalities, Pakistan must adopt similar standards.

Ratifying ILO conventions, aligning national laws with global best practices, and strengthening welfare mechanisms for miners and their families are vital steps for creating a safer mining environment.

Hussain Ahmad Siddiqui
Islamabad

Organ donation

PAKISTAN faces a silent, but growing transplant crisis. According to data from major transplant centres, thousands of patients remain on the waiting list every year, while deceased organ donation in the country remains almost non-existent despite legal approval under the Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Act, 2010.

The current law operates on an opt-in consent model, requiring prior donor registration or family consent at a time of profound grief. While the Act recognises brain and brainstem death, the absence of a robust deceased donation framework, hospital-based coordination systems, and public trust has severely limited donor availability. As a consequence, potentially life-saving organs are lost on a daily basis.

There are countries that offer instructive examples. Spain, which leads the world in deceased organ donation, has adopted an opt-out system supported by strong hospital coordination and public awareness. Wales has also reported similar improvements following due legislative reforms.

Importantly, these systems focus not just on law, but also on transparency, public education and highly trained transplant coordinators.

In Muslim-majority countries, such as Saudi Arabia, religious endorsement and structured national campaigns have played a central role in increasing acceptance of organ donation.

Pakistan does not necessarily need to replicate any foreign model wholesale. However, revisiting consent mechanisms, strengthening hospital-based donation systems, and launching sustained public and religious awareness initiatives could significantly expand the donor pool.

Such reforms would honour both ethical principles and the urgent needs of patients whose lives depend on timely transplants.

Toqeer Abbas
President, Dow Organ Support Society
Karachi

Digital challenges

THE provincial government in Sindh has recently launched online registration of births, deaths, marriages and divorces. It has also introduced an e-challan system to bring traffic discipline in Karachi. These are major steps towards digitalisation.

The Civil Registration Management System (CRMS) promises to end queues, misplaced files and unwanted visits to union council (UC) offices, while the e-challan system reflects a shift towards automated and transparent traffic system.

By linking all 30 districts and hundreds of health facilities, the province aims at ensuring near-instant documentation, creating a reliable data foundation for health planning, education, and social services.

The decision to waive National Database and Registration Authority (Nadra) fee for birth and death registrations makes the reforms even more inclusive for most families that were for long burdened by affordability issues.

Yet, digital reforms in Sindh often fade after the initial excitement. The real challenge lies in the shape of understaffed UC offices, uneven internet access, and entrenched bureaucratic habits that stall even the most ambitious of initiatives.

Mandating swift civic registration or scaling up e-challans will only work if training, monitoring and accountability accompany the technology. Integrating vaccination records and disease surveillance is a promising leap, but system maintenance, cybersecurity and public accessibility remain critical weak points.

Sindh has opened the door to a paperless future, but crossing the digital threshold will require consistency, oversight and a genuine effort to overcome the inefficiencies this digital shift seeks to replace.

Sadam Hussain Korai
Larkana

Rawalpindi woes

THE province of Punjab is moving towards environmental improvement through the Clean Punjab initiative, which is a commendable and people-friendly step. One hopes that Rawalpindi will also get the due attention of the authorities. As things stand, garbage in several city areas is not collected for days, resulting in heaps of waste accumulating at various locations. The Clean Punjab vehicles often fail to reach these areas on time.

Unfortunately, the piles of waste not only pollute the environment, but also contribute to the spread of various diseases, particularly dangerous illnesses, such as dengue. How long are citizens expected to keep garbage inside their homes?

Due to lack of proper facilities, people are often compelled to dispose of waste along the streets or in vacant plots, especially since large garbage containers or dustbins are unavailable in many areas.

Although Clean Punjab vehicles operate in some narrow streets and marketplaces, they remain absent for several days at a stretch. Moreover, the poor condition of these vehicles is a serious concern, as the excessive smoke they emit further pollutes the already severely polluted surroundings, posing additional health risks to the community.

The government should take immediate notice of these serious issues, and make the city's sanitation system much more effective. A proper schedule should be set for large garbage-collection trucks operating in markets and along major roads. Clean Punjab is an excellent and much-needed initiative, but its success depends on its effective implemention.

Hayan Ahmed Khan
Islamabad

▶ **GAS SHORTAGE:** The ongoing shortage of natural gas is a serious concern for the people, especially because of the bitterly cold weather. Sadly, households are forced to use costly firewood, which also causes pollution and deforestation. The gas shortage, as such, makes life miserable for the people as they continue to struggle to cook and keep warm when they need to. Lack of planning and poor management have really worsened the crisis. The authorities concerned must take action to address the issue.
Muzzamil Karim
Turbat

▶ **SMART METERS:** The reports of alleged corruption worth around Rs6.5 billion related to smart meter procurement by the Lahore Electric Supply Company (Lesco) are shocking. This huge amount could have been used to improve services, reduce bills or upgrade infrastructure. Instead, consumers are left with faulty meters, confusing readings and rising charges. Smart meters were introduced as a reform to fix overbilling, but the very project is now under investigation. People are told to be patient and responsible, while billions are allegedly misused without consequences. The official inquiry must not end quietly. The public deserves and has right to know who approved these decisions.
Kiran
Lahore

▶ **FOOTBALL FIELDS:** The lack of football fields in Hub district is a serious concern. The young are forced to play on the streets, endangering their safety. The situation deprives them of their right to have access to healthy activities. Unfortunately, due to a lack of suitable sports infrastructure in the city, skill and potential remain untapped and wasted. Football fields serve an important role in encouraging physical fitness, discipline and teamwork among youngsters. They would also allow young players to be competitive, keeping them involved in healthy activities. Lack of this essential infrastructure forces them to choose unhealthy activities. The government should establish a football ground in Hub.
Mukhtiar Mehr
Hub

External Ombudsman

Veteran journalist Muhammad Ali Siddiqi is *Dawn's* External Ombudsman (DEO). His duty is to attend to our readers' complaints, and to respond to them professionally. DEO is the investigating authority to whom all complaints can be referred, and it is DEO who takes notice of any alleged violations of *Dawn's* code of ethics, and informs the Editor for appropriate action.
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